Repercussion

written by

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1 INT. AVA'S STUDIO - NIGHT

A single desk lamp carves a pool of amber light out of the gloom. The rest of the room is swallowed by oppressive shadows.

Dozens of half-finished canvases line the walls. The painted faces seem to lean forward, their fixed gazes tracking the only movement in the room.

AVA (25, wild curls, eyes hollowed by insomnia) hunches over her stool. Her right hand shakes with a violent tremor. She grips the brush with white-knuckled intensity, forcing a jagged stroke across the canvas.

ON THE CANVAS: A man's portrait. **ILIA**. His eyes are dark, heavy, and impossibly sharp. They carry a look that is half-pleading, half-predatory.

The brush scrapes the linen—a dry, rhythmic *skritch-skritch-skritch* that sounds like shallow breathing.

AVA
(a fractured whisper)
Just... one... more.

She drops the brush. It clatters on the floor, the sound echoing like a gunshot.

Ava recoils, her breath hitching in her chest. She stares at the portrait.

Under the flickering lamp, the oil paint looks wet, glistening like actual skin. The shadows on the wall shift—not because of a breeze, but because the light is dying.

CLOSE ON - THE PORTRAIT The light hits the gloss of the eyes. For a split second, the reflection makes it look as if the pupils have constricted. A trick of the light. Or a trick of her mind.

Ava's breathing becomes a ragged wheeze. She doesn't look away. She can't. To look away is to let him move.

She reaches for the lamp. Her fingers hover over the switch, trembling.

CLICK.

Total darkness.

The *skritch* of the brush echoes once more in the blackness, though the brush is on the floor.

2 INT. AVA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT (CONTINUOUS)

Ava lies rigid on the bed, her stare fixed on the ceiling. Above her, the shadows of tree branches crawl across the plaster like spindly fingers.

The wind moans outside—a low, rhythmic sigh that never stops.

SKRITCH.
The sound of a dry brush dragging over canvas. It's sharp, cutting through the silence.

Ava bolts upright. Her pulse thumps visibly in her throat. She holds her breath, straining to hear, but the room is dead still. Only the sound of her own blood rushing in her ears.

3 INT. AVA'S STUDIO - NIGHT

Ava stands in the doorway, a ghost in her own home. Her eyes dart from the blank canvases to **ILIA**.

The portrait seems different in this light. The warm glow of the desk lamp feels oily, sickly.

She takes a tentative step back, her breath hitching. The shadows on the floor seem to detach themselves from the furniture, stretching toward her feet.

Ava doesn't blink. She is paralyzed, caught in the gravity of those painted eyes. To her, they aren't just oil and pigment anymore—they are a mirror reflecting something she doesn't want to admit.

The lamp flickers. Once. Twice. Each flash of darkness feels longer than the last.

CLOSE ON - THE CANVAS

The paint seems to pulse. A trick of the flickering light makes the man's chest appear to rise and fall in a shallow breath.

A cold draft brushes Ava's cheek, but there is no open window.

Ava moves toward the desk like a sleepwalker. Her hand hovers over the lamp. She isn't just turning off a light; she's trying to kill a vision.

CLICK.

The room plunges into blackness.

But the "after-image" of Ilia’s eyes remains burned into her retinas, glowing in the dark.

4 INT. AVA’S STUDIO - NIGHT

Ava is a heap on the floor, her elbows scraping against the floorboards as she kicks herself backward. Her breathing is a series of broken, jagged gasps.

ILIA (30s) stands over her. He is not quite "human"—his skin has the matte texture of dried oil paint, and the light hits him in static, painterly highlights. He doesn't move like a person; he moves like a memory.

The studio feels smaller. The walls seem to lean inward.

ILIA
(voice like grinding pigment)
We need to talk.

Ava’s back hits the base of a heavy wooden easel. A jar of turpentine topples, spilling across the floor. The chemical scent is overwhelming, stinging her nose.

AVA
(choking out the words)
You’re not... you’re just...

ILIA
(interrupting)
What you made me?

He tilts his head. The movement is stiff, unnatural. He takes a step forward, his boots making no sound on the hardwood—a terrifying silence.

ILIA (CONT'D) (CONT'D)
You gave me these eyes, Ava. Did you think I wouldn’t use them to look at you?

He kneels, his face inches from hers. Up close, she can see the brushstrokes in his iris.

AVA
I’m losing my mind. This is the exhaustion. It’s the fumes.

She shuts her eyes tight, pressing her palms against her sockets until she sees stars.

ILIA (O.S.)
Open them.

Ava shakes her head, tears streaking through the charcoal dust on her cheeks.

ILIA (V.O.)
Open them, Ava. Or I'll start painting the rest of the room.

Ava snaps her eyes open.

Ilia is gone.

The studio is empty. The lamp flickers one last time and dies.

Ava gasps, scrambling to her feet, fumbling for the light. When she finally finds the switch and clicks it—

THE CANVAS IS BLANK.

The man is gone from the frame. Only a faint, wet smear of dark paint remains where his heart should be.

5 INT. AVA'S STUDIO - NIGHT

The darkness is absolute, except for the rhythmic pulse of lightning outside.

Ava is pressed against the wall, her fingernails digging into the wallpaper. Every time the lightning flashes, the studio looks different—distorted.

AVA
(choking on her breath)
You're not here. You're a projection. A... a breakdown.

ILIA (O.S.)
(whispering from behind her)
Is that what you call a soul these days? A projection?

Ava spins around. **FLASH.** The lightning reveals a silhouette standing by the window. **DARKNESS.** Ava lunges for the desk lamp, knocking over a jar of brushes. They clatter like falling bones. She finds the switch and clicks it frantically.

The light hums to life, weak and orange.

The studio is empty. But the **CANVAS**—it is no longer on the easel. It's lying flat on the floor, face down, as if it fell. Or jumped.

Ava slowly approaches the fallen canvas. Her shadow, cast by the flickering lamp, looks like a giant hovering over a grave.

She reaches down, her hand trembling so much she can barely grip the wooden frame. She flips it over.

THE CANVAS IS BLANK. A void of white primer. No eyes. No Ilia.

But then, she feels it. Something wet and cold dripping onto her shoulder.

She looks up at the ceiling.

A smear of **FRESH OIL PAINT** is spreading across the white plaster above her head, forming the shape of a hand—a hand that wasn't there a second ago.

AVA
(a broken sob)
Get out of my head.

ILIA (V.O.)
I can't, Ava. You painted me into the substrate. I'm in the walls now.

Suddenly, the floorboards **CREAK** directly behind her. Not the house settling. A deliberate, heavy footstep.

Ava freezes. She doesn't turn around. She sees her own shadow on the wall, and slowly, **ANOTHER SHADOW** rises to meet hers, its hand reaching out to touch her silhouette's hair.

6 INT. AVA'S STUDIO - NIGHT (MOMENTS LATER)

Ava sits on the edge of her wooden chair, every muscle coiled, ready to spring.

Ilia moves with a strange, liquid grace toward the work table. His fingers—stained with the same dark pigment as the portrait—graze the brushes. They make a dry, whispering sound against the bristles.

AVA
(voice a fragile thread)
Who... what are you? How is this possible?

ILIA
(measured, his eyes heavy with an ancient sorrow)
I am the sum of your intentions, Ava. I breathe... because you refused to let me stay silent.

Ava presses her spine against the cold wall, her eyes searching for an exit.

AVA
No. This is a breakdown. Sleep deprivation. It’s a nightmare... it has to be.

Ilia reaches toward her. His hand moves through the air with a slight, blurring trail—like a slow-shutter photograph. He is physically there, yet he feels like an optical after-image.

ILIA
Nightmare... or a truth you’ve spent years editing? Why did you paint me with these eyes?

Ava’s breath hitches. She is stunned, trapped in his gaze.

ILIA (CONT'D) (CONT'D)
You gave me life... but you left me hollow. There is a piece of me missing. Or perhaps... it’s a piece of yourself you cut away and trapped in this linen.

Ilia turns away, his attention drawn to another canvas: a dark, suffocating forest of tangled black boughs. He studies it with a haunting familiarity.

ILIA (CONT'D) (CONT'D)
(low, mysterious)
And what about these? The others you brought here... where are they hiding now?

Suddenly, the sound of **RUSTLING LEAVES** fills the room—not from outside, but from the corners of the studio. A dry, papery whisper of voices trapped in the weave of the canvases for years.

Ava freezes. The air feels thick, saturated with the smell of old oil and damp earth. The boundary between the room and the painted world is thinning, ready to snap.

7 EXT. PAINTING - DARK FOREST - IMAGINARY

The camera **PULLS** into the weave of the canvas, dissolving the boundary between thread and reality.

Tall, skeletal trees claw at a ceiling of thick, charcoal mist. There is no sun here. Vague, translucent shadows shift among the branches—memories without faces, caught in a perpetual loop of brushstrokes.

The wind coils through the undergrowth, carrying a mournful, dry rustle. It’s the sound of a thousand sighs, trapped behind a layer of varnish.

8 INT. AVA’S STUDIO - NIGHT

Ava stares at Ilia, her back pressed so hard against the wall that her spine aches. Her voice is a fractured whisper.

AVA
Stop it... It’s just pigment. Just linseed oil and linen. I’m an artist, Ilia. I don’t... I don’t play God.

Ilia stands perfectly still. In the flickering lamp light, he looks both solid and hollow.

ILIA
(with a terrifying calm)
Then why do we have names? Why do we have weight?

AVA
(pleading, tears blurring her vision)
I don’t know. I can’t explain it. I didn’t mean for any of this...

Ilia takes a step. The floorboards don't creak—instead, there is the wet, tacky sound of footsteps on fresh paint. He reaches out, his hand cutting through the air with a deliberate, haunting intent.

ILIA
Then learn to carry what you create.

He stops inches from her face. She can smell the forest from the painting—damp earth and rotting leaves.

ILIA (CONT'D) (CONT'D)
Finish us, Ava. Or we will never be free. And neither will you.

9 INT. AVA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT - DREAM

Ava thrashes beneath the sheets, trapped in a feverish rhythm. Her breath comes in jagged, shallow hitches.

The shadows on the bedroom walls begin to liquefy. The plaster dissolves into the tangled, dark boughs of the forest. The room is no longer a room.

She is standing in the mist. A massive, faceless silhouette—looming and fluid—drifts between the ancient trees, snapping branches that sound like breaking bone.

ILIA (V.O.)
(a cavernous whisper)
You are the only one who can set us free.

Ava jolts upright. **GASPING.** Her skin is slick with sweat, her heart hammering against her ribs like a trapped bird.

10 INT. AVA'S STUDIO - NEXT DAY

Daylight is a myth. Outside, thunder rumbles, and a violent rain lashes against the glass, blurring the world into grey streaks.

Ava enters, her movements sluggish, eyes bloodshot and haunted. She stops before the canvases. The Forest painting has changed—the shadows are deeper, the mist more opaque, as if it's exhaling into the room.

AVA
(a broken murmur)
Are you real? Can I even help you?

ILIA steps out from a corner swathed in shadow. He is paler today, his features more defined, his eyes like two burning coals.

ILIA
It's time to choose, Ava.

Ava's gaze snaps to the forest canvas. The **RUSTLE** of leaves is no longer a whisper; it's a roar.

From the bottom of the frame, a pool of ink-black shadow—something darker than paint, something undefined—begins to slide across the studio floor, moving toward her like a predator.

AVA
(backing away, horrified)
What... what do you want from me?

ILIA Freedom.

He looks at the creeping darkness on the floor.

ILIA (CONT'D)
But understand this: if you fail to finish what you started, something far worse will crawl out of that mist. And it won't be looking for a conversation.

11 EXT. PAINTING - MYSTERIOUS FOREST - IMAGINARY

The camera drifts through a veil of fog. Tall, skeletal trees vanish into a white void. Beneath Ava’s feet, the dry leaves don't crunch—they whisper like forgotten secrets.

From the heart of the mist, a massive, obsidian silhouette looms. **NEXA**. Its form is fluid, ink-like, with eyes that burn with a freezing, predatory light.

NEXA
(a voice like grinding stone)
This is our world... and you have broken its laws.

Ava recoils, her face a mask of raw terror. The mist swirls violently, but through the chaos, a familiar, haunting melody of a voice drifts through the trees.

ILIA (V.O.)
Ava... I am here. You only need to face the truth. Face what you’ve done.

12 INT. AVA’S STUDIO - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

Ava snaps back to reality, collapsing into her wooden chair. She is shivering, her breath coming in ragged gasps.

AVA
(a broken whisper)
I can’t... it’s too much.

A sudden, sharp **KNOCK** at the door.

Ava rises, her movements heavy and reluctant. She opens the door. **ILIA** stands there—no longer just a painting, but a man of flesh and shadow. Calm. Insistent.

ILIA This isn’t a simple choice, Ava. This is the weight of our lives. Decide.

13 INT. AVA’S STUDIO - NIGHT - FINAL ACTION

Ava turns to the wall of canvases. They begin to glow with an internal, ethereal light—miniature universes humming with life.

She stops before the Forest Painting. Her hand hovers over the canvas, the brush trembling between her fingers.

AVA
I can’t let you stay trapped in this half-life. You have to be free.

She doesn't paint. She **ignites**.

One by one, the canvases catch fire—a symbolic, magical blaze. The painted forests, the faceless shadows, and the shifting figures are engulfed in orange heat. They don't burn like paper; they vanish like evaporating mist.

Ava stops before the very last canvas. The flames lick the edges, but she doesn't move. Inside the frame, Ilia stands perfectly still, watching her through the smoke.

AVA (CONT'D) (CONT'D)
Perhaps... I should have let you choose. Maybe in another life, we’ll have a different chance.

14 INT. AVA’S STUDIO - NIGHT - OPEN ENDING

CLOSE ON - AVA

Her expression is a fragile mix of doubt and serenity. The roar of the fire fades into a heavy, ash-filled silence.

The camera crawls toward the charred remains of the forest painting. Ash hangs suspended in the air like grey snow.

Amidst the scorched threads of the canvas, **ILIA'S EYES** snap open. They are calm, patient, and eternal.

FADE OUT.